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(54) Fan brake for removable module

(57) Fan brakes for decelerating blower impellers particularly for modular equipment enclosures (100) are described. A module (110) includes a blower (120) having an impeller (200) with a plurality of blades (210). The brake (250) engages the impeller body (220) or blades (210) when the module is at least partially removed from the enclosure and disengages the impeller when the module is inserted into the enclosure. One brake includes an arm (254) coupled to a braking surface (252). The arm applies the braking surface to the impeller when disengaged by a cam (258) and retracts the braking surface from the impeller when engaged by the cam. A solenoid may be used in lieu of a cam for directly (560) or indirectly (460) applying the braking surface.

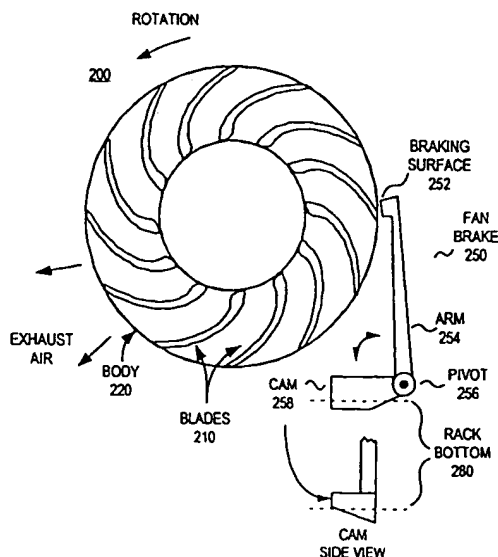


FIG. 2

Description

[0001] This invention relates to the field of blowers. In particular, this invention is drawn to blower impeller design.

[0002] Cabinetry or enclosures for heat generating equipment may contain one or more blowers for active or forced air cooling. The blower displaces the air within the enclosure volume with cooler air external to the enclosure volume. The blower acts as a pump to exchange air inside the enclosure with air external to the enclosure. Typically, the blower is mounted such that the blades are near the enclosure wall. A guard or cage is often used to prevent objects external to the enclosure from contacting the spinning blades. Once inside the enclosure, however, there is no protection from the spinning blades.

[0003] The equipment can be powered down to minimise any risk of contacting exposed blades within the enclosure. Computer servers are often specifically designed with hot pluggable modules. Hot pluggability enables replacing the modules without powering the equipment down in order to ensure a high level of availability. Powering down the equipment before servicing defeats the purpose of designing the equipment for hot pluggability.

[0004] The present invention seeks to provide an improved blower fan brake.

[0005] According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided apparatus as specified in claim 1.

[0006] In view of limitations of known systems and methods, a variety of blower fan brakes for equipment enclosures are disclosed. One apparatus includes a module configured for insertion into an enclosure. The module includes at least one blower having an impeller with a plurality of blades. A fan brake engages the impeller when the module is at least partially removed from the enclosure. The fan brake disengages the impeller when the module is inserted into the enclosure.

[0007] One blower apparatus includes an impeller having a plurality of blades, a braking surface, and an arm coupled to the braking surface. The arm applies the braking surface to the impeller when disengaged by a cam. The arm retracts the braking surface from the impeller when engaged by the cam.

[0008] In various embodiments, the braking surface is applied to the impeller body or the blades. The braking surface may be contoured in a shaped complementary to that of a portion of the periphery of the impeller body. Alternatively, the braking surface may comprise a flap for braking the blades. In some embodiments, a solenoid is used in lieu of the cam for either directly or indirectly applying the braking surface to the impeller upon removal of power.

[0009] Embodiments of the present invention are described below, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 illustrates an enclosure with a plurality of removable modules;

Figure 2 illustrates one embodiment of a cam activated blower fan brake;

Figure 3 illustrates an alternative embodiment of a cam activated blower fan brake;

Figure 4 illustrates one embodiment of a solenoid activated blower fan brake; and

Figure 5 illustrates an alternative embodiment of a solenoid activated blower fan brake.

[0010] Computer system enclosures frequently have one or more blowers used for cooling the computer. In modular computer equipment, the blowers may be integral with removable modules. Alternatively, the blower may be located on a wall of the equipment enclosure. Figure 1 illustrates one embodiment of an enclosure 100 for modular or rack mounted equipment including a plurality of modules 110. The modules include one or more blowers 120.

[0011] Blowers can pose a safety hazard to individuals servicing the computer system. In particular, blowers integral to removable modules pose a safety hazard to service technicians. The modules are designed to be removed while power is applied to the computer system. Although guards or cages 130 protect inadvertent exposure to the blower impeller blades from outside the enclosure, once inside the enclosure or module there is little protection from the spinning blades.

[0012] Although removal of the module may disconnect the blower from power, the blower impeller may continue spinning for a considerable time due to inertia. The technician may not be cognisant of the motion of the blades due to the high rotational speed of the impeller. The technician may not have audio cues either due to the use of quiet blowers or a high level of background noise masking the sound of the blowers. Contact with the spinning blades poses safety issues ranging from startling the technician to serious injury.

[0013] In order to decrease the risk of injury, a fan brake is provided. The fan brake engages or disengages the blower impeller when the module is at least partially displaced from its installed position within the enclosure. In one embodiment, the module is mechanically disconnected from power once it is withdrawn a selected distance from its installed position. To ensure that the fan brake is not applied while the blower is powered, the fan brake engages/disengages the blower impeller at a distance greater than or equal to the selected distance when the module is being removed/inserted.

[0014] Figure 2 illustrates one embodiment of an impeller 200 and fan brake 250. The fan brake applies a braking surface 252 to either an impeller body 220 or the blades 210 of the impeller to decelerate the rotating impeller. In the latter case, the braking action tends to provide an audio reminder that the technician should proceed with caution.

[0015] In one embodiment, fan brake 250 comprises

a braking surface 252, an arm 254, a pivot or lunge 256, and a cam 258. The cam is sloped for ease of engaging when the module is inserted into the enclosure. For example, the cam may be positioned to engage the enclosure (e.g., rack bottom 280) when the module is inserted. The arm maintains the braking surface against the impeller until engaged by the cam. The arm can be sprung loaded to ensure that the arm has a tendency to apply the braking surface to the impeller. For example, pivot 256 is sprung loaded in one embodiment.

[0016] When the module is inserted into the enclosure, cam 258 engages the arm 254 to disengage or retract the braking surface 252 from impeller 200. When cam 258 disengages arm 254, the arm applies braking surface 252 to the impeller.

[0017] In one embodiment, the braking surface contacts the impeller body 220 but not the impeller blades 210. The braking surface 252 may be contoured to better accommodate the shape of the impeller body periphery in such an embodiment. For example, the braking surface may be arc shaped to accommodate an impeller body having a circular periphery.

[0018] In an alternative embodiment, the braking surface 252 contacts the impeller blades 210. The braking surface contacts each blade as it passes while the impeller continues to rotate. Due to the spacing between blades, the braking effect will be intermittent. This approach tends to result in further notice to the service technician in the form of an audible "clack-clack" noise lasting from the time the fan brake is applied until the impeller has stopped rotating. The shape of the braking surface may be chosen to enhance the audio signal.

[0019] Figure 3 illustrates one embodiment of the fan brake 350 having a brake surface 352 suited for decelerating the impeller through contact with the blades 310. In order to distribute the braking force across the blade, the braking surface 352 may be designed as a flap (top view 352). In one embodiment, the flap is composed of a flexible, resilient material such as a plastics material.

[0020] Figures 4 and 5 illustrate an embodiment of a fan brake having a solenoid in lieu of a cam for activation. The solenoid 460 rod may be used to engage a separate braking arm 454 in order to apply the braking surface 452 as illustrated in Figure 4. Alternatively, the braking surface 562 may be affixed to an end of the solenoid 560 rod or core as illustrated in Figure 5. Thus the solenoid can be used for direct or indirect application of the braking surface to the impeller. In either variation, the braking surface may be configured for application to the blades or the impeller body.

[0021] The solenoid variation requires the solenoid to engage the blower impeller when the solenoid is in a de-energised state. When the module is removed from the enclosure, power to the module and the solenoid 460, 560 is removed. Upon removal of power, the solenoid engages the blower impeller. Conversely, the solenoid must be in an energised state to disengage the fan brake. Electrical solutions such as solenoids may be un-

desirable in energy conscious applications because the solenoid must draw power the entire time the module is inserted in the enclosure.

[0022] Specific exemplary embodiments of the invention have been described. Various modifications and changes may be made thereto without departing from the scope of the claims. The specification and drawings are, accordingly, to be regarded in an illustrative rather than a restrictive sense.

[0023] The disclosures in United States patent application no. 09/834,767, from which this application claims priority, and in the abstract accompanying this application are incorporated herein by reference.

Claims

1. Apparatus including:

a module configured for insertion into an enclosure, the module having at least one blower including an impeller provided with one or more blades; and

a fan brake coupled to the module and operable to engage the impeller when the module is at least partially removed from the enclosure and to disengage the impeller when the module is inserted into the enclosure.

2. Apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the fan brake includes a solenoid operable to apply a braking surface to the impeller upon removal of power and to retract a braking surface from the impeller upon application of power.

3. Apparatus as in claim 2, wherein the fan brake includes an arm pivotably coupled to the module and the solenoid, the braking surface being located on the arm; wherein the solenoid is operable to engage the arm to apply the braking surface to the impeller.

4. Apparatus as in claim 2, wherein the braking surface is affixed to a solenoid rod, wherein the solenoid is operable to apply the braking surface to the impeller upon removal of power.

5. Apparatus as in claim 1, wherein the fan brake includes:

an arm coupled to the braking surface and pivotably coupled to the module; and

a cam coupled to engage the arm so as to disengage the braking surface from the impeller upon insertion of the module into the enclosure, wherein the arm is operable to apply the braking surface to the impeller upon at least partial removal of the module from the enclosure.

6. Apparatus as in claim 5, wherein the pivotable coupling is spring loaded.
7. A apparatus as in claim 2 or 5, wherein the braking surface is applied to a selected one of a body of the impeller or the blades. 5
8. Apparatus as in claim 2 or 5, wherein the braking surface is a flap. 10
9. Apparatus as in claim 2 or 5, wherein the braking surface is contoured to a shape complementary to that of the periphery of the body of the impeller. 15

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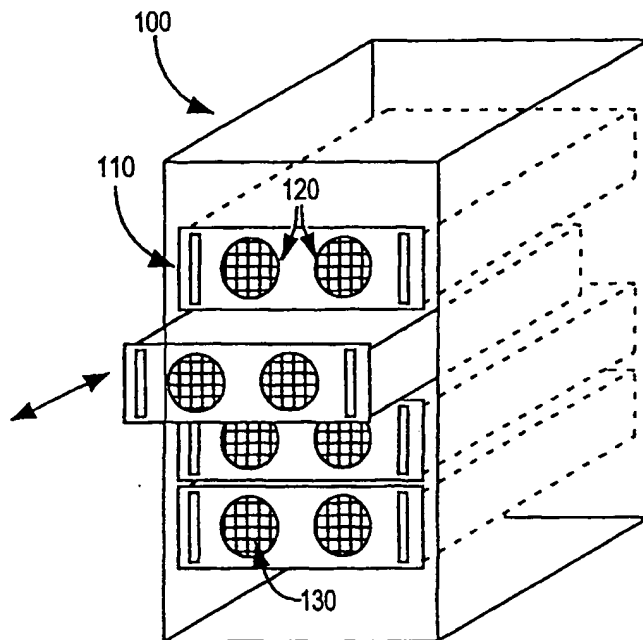


FIG. 1

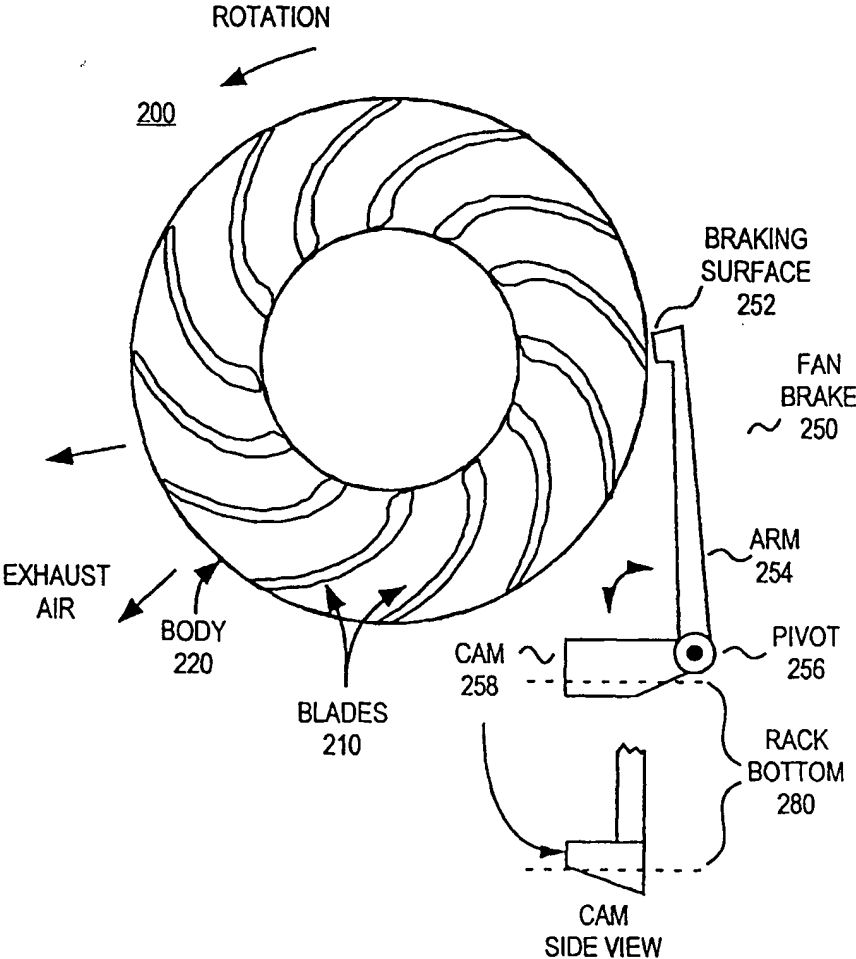


FIG. 2

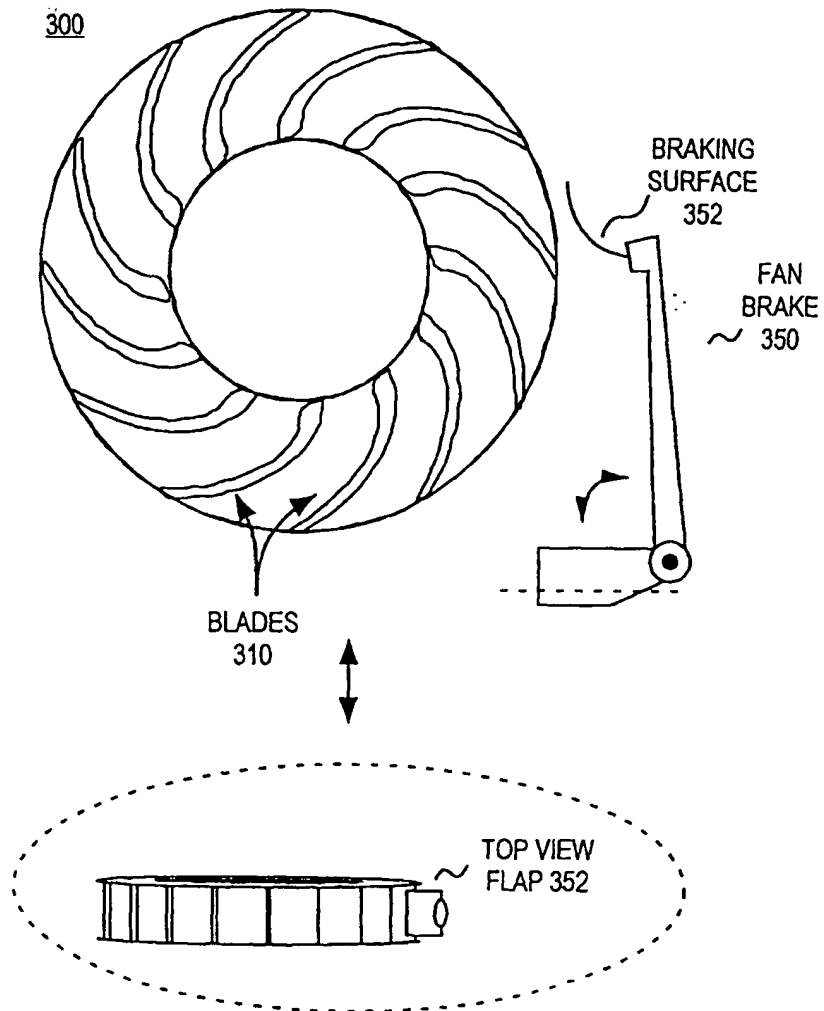


FIG. 3

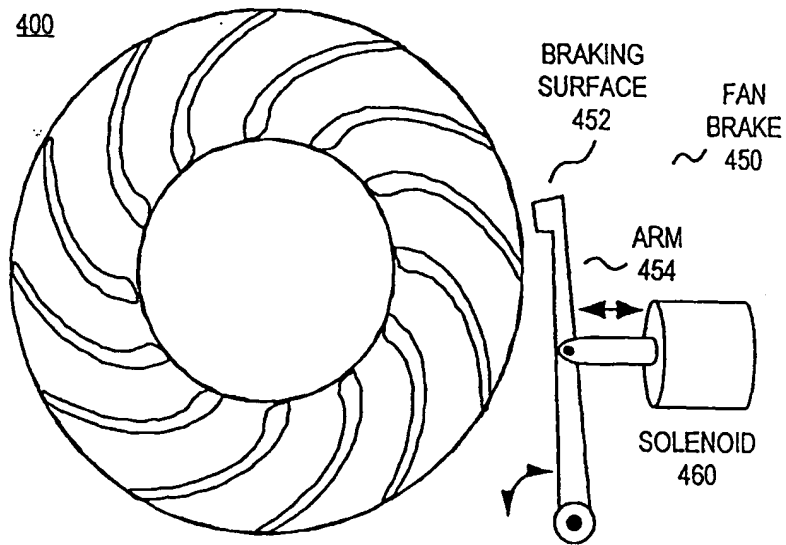


FIG. 4

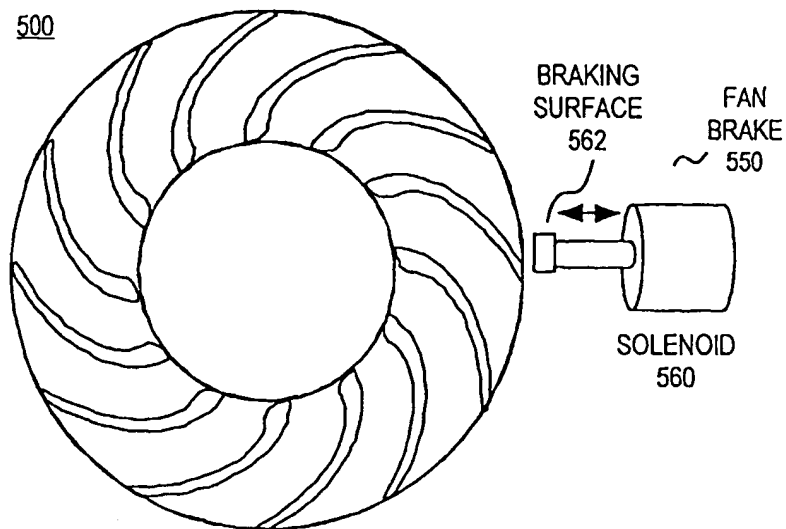


FIG. 5



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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 02 25 1545

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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7) H05K F04D
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 14 August 2002	Examiner Toussaint, F
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			

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This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
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